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57.0510 GB NP

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26 MAR 2003

3. Full name, address and postcode of the or of each applicant *(underline all surnames)*

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7236326001

Patents ADP number *(if you know it)*

British Virgin Islands

If the applicant is a corporate body, give the country/state of its incorporation

4. Title of the invention

BOREHOLE TELEMETRY SYSTEM

5. Name of your agent *(if you have one)*

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/ /

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Date
25 March 2003

12. Name and daytime telephone number of person to contact in the United Kingdom William L. WANG,
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DUPLICATE

BOREHOLE TELEMETRY SYSTEM

The present invention generally relates to an apparatus and a method for communicating parameters relating to down-hole 5 conditions to the surface. More specifically, it pertains to such an apparatus and method for acoustic communication.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

One of the more difficult problems associated with any 10 borehole is to communicate measured data between one or more locations down a borehole and the surface, or between down-hole locations themselves. For example, communication is desired by the oil industry to retrieve, at the surface, data generated down-hole during operations such as 15 perforating, fracturing, and drill stem or well testing; and during production operations such as reservoir evaluation testing, pressure and temperature monitoring. Communication is also desired to transmit intelligence from the surface to down-hole tools or instruments to effect, control or modify 20 operations or parameters.

Accurate and reliable down-hole communication is particularly important when complex data comprising a set of measurements or instructions is to be communicated, i.e., 25 when more than a single measurement or a simple trigger signal has to be communicated. For the transmission of complex data it is often desirable to communicate encoded digital signals.

30 One approach which has been widely considered for borehole communication is to use a direct wire connection between the surface and the down-hole location(s). Communication then

can be made via electrical signal through the wire. While much effort has been spent on "wireline" communication, its inherent high telemetry rate is not always needed and very often does not justify its high cost.

5

Another borehole communication technique that has been explored is the transmission of acoustic waves. Whereas in some cases the pipes and tubulars within the well can be used to transmit acoustic waves, commercially available 10 systems utilize the various liquids within a borehole as the transmission medium.

Among those techniques that use liquids as medium are the well-established Measurement-While-Drilling or MWD 15 techniques. A common element of the MWD and related methods is the use of a flowing medium, e.g., the drilling fluids pumped during the drilling operation. This requirement however prevents the use of MWD techniques in operations during which a flowing medium is not available.

20

In recognition of this limitation various systems of acoustic transmission in a liquid independent of movement have been put forward, for example in the US Pat. Nos. 3,659,259; 3,964,556; 5,283,768 or 6,442,105. Most of these 25 known approaches are either severally limited in scope and operability or require down-hole transmitters that consume a large amount of energy.

It is therefore an object of the present invention to 30 provide an acoustic communication system that overcomes the limitations of existing devices to allow the communication of data between a down-hole location and a surface location.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In accordance with a first aspect of the invention, there is
5 provided an acoustic telemetry apparatus for communicating
digital data from a down-hole location through a borehole to
the surface comprising an acoustic channel terminated at a
down-hole end by a reflecting terminal, an acoustic wave
generator located at the surface and providing an acoustic
10 wave carrier signal through said acoustic channel, a
modulator to modulate amplitude and/or phase of said carrier
wave in response to a digital signal and one or more sensors
located at the surface adapted to detect amplitude and/or
phase related information of acoustic waves traveling within
15 said acoustic channel.

The new system allows the communication of encoded data that
may contain the results of more than one or two different
types of measurements, such as pressure and temperature.
20

The acoustic channel used for the present invention is
preferably a continuous liquid-filled channel. Often it is
preferable to use a low -loss acoustic medium, thus
excluding the usual borehole fluids that are often highly
25 viscous. Preferable media include liquids with viscosity of
less than 3×10^{-3} NS/m², such as water and light oils.

The modulator includes preferably a Helmholtz-type resonator
having an tubular opening to the acoustic channel in the
30 vicinity of the reflecting terminal. The modulator is
preferably used to close or open the opening thus changing
the phase and/or amplitude of the reflected signal. The

reflecting terminal can have various shapes, including a solid body that closes the acoustic channel, provided it is rigid and therefore constitutes good reflector for the incoming wave.

5

The acoustic source at the surface preferably generates a continuous or quasi-continuous carrier wave that is reflected at the terminal with controllable phase and/or amplitude shifts induced by the modulator.

10

In a preferred variant the apparatus may include an acoustic receiver at the down-hole location thus enabling a two-way communication.

15

The surface-based part of the telemetry system preferably includes signal processing means designed to filter the unreflected (downwards traveling) carrier wave signal from the upwards traveling reflected and modulated wave signals.

20

To minimize the power consumption of the down-hole apparatus, there are included a further variant of the invention one or more piezoelectric actuators combined with suitable mechanical amplifiers to increase the effective displacement of the actuator system. The energy efficient actuators can be used to control the reflection properties of the reflecting terminal.

25

Dependence on batteries as source of power for down-hole tools can be further reduced by using an electro-acoustic transducer that regenerates electrical energy from an acoustic wave generated at the surface. This down-hole power generator can be used for various applications, if, however,

used in conjunction with other elements of the present invention, it is advantageous to generate the acoustic wave used to produce power down-hole at a frequency separated from the signal carrier frequency used for telemetry.

5

In accordance with the yet another aspect of the invention, there is provided a method of communicating digital data from a down-hole location through a borehole to surface, the method comprising the steps of establishing an acoustic 10 channel through the borehole and terminating the channel at a down-hole by a reflecting terminal, generating from the surface an acoustic wave carrier signal within the acoustic channel, modulating amplitude and/or phase of the carrier wave in response to a digital signal and detecting at the 15 surface amplitude and/or phase related information of acoustic waves traveling within the acoustic channel.

In a preferred variant of the invention, the method includes the steps of changing the reflecting properties of the 20 reflecting terminal in order to modulate amplitude and/or phase of the carrier wave.

In yet another preferred variant of the above method, a Helmholtz resonator positioned close to the reflecting 25 terminal is used to modulate the reflecting properties of that terminal.

In a further preferred variant of the invention, a base frequency of the carrier wave is matched to a resonant 30 frequency of the Helmholtz resonator. An approximate match can be performed prior to the deployment of the communication system with the knowledge of the dimension and

other properties of the resonator. Alternatively or additionally, the carrier wave frequency may be tuned after the deployment of the system, preferably through an optimization process involving the step of scanning through 5 a range of possible carrier frequencies and evaluating the signal strength of the modulated reflected wave signal.

It is seen as an advantage of the present invention that a plurality of down-hole measurements can be performed 10 simultaneously with the resulting measurements being encoded into a digital bit stream that is subsequently used to modulate the carrier wave. The modulated carrier wave travels in direction of the surface where it is registered using appropriate sensors.

15

These and other aspects of the invention will be apparent from the following detailed description of non-limitative examples and drawings.

20

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 illustrates elements of an acoustic telemetry system in accordance with an example of the invention;

25 Fig. 2 shows elements of a variant of the novel telemetry system;

FIGs. 3A,B show another telemetry system in accordance with the invention for deployment on coiled tubing 30 during stimulation operations;

FIGs. 4A,B show simulated signal power spectra as received

at a surface location with and without interference of the source spectrum, respectively;

5 FIGs. 5A,B are flow charts illustrating a tuning method for a telemetry system in accordance with the present invention;

10 FIG. 6 illustrates an element of a telemetry system in accordance with the present invention with low power consumption;

FIGs. 7A,B are schematic drawings of elements of a down-hole power source; and

15 FIG. 8 is a flow diagram illustrating steps of a method in accordance with the invention.

EXAMPLES

20 Referring first to the schematic drawing of FIG.1, there is shown a cross-section through a cased wellbore 110 with a work string 120 suspended therein. Between the work string 120 and the casing 111 there is an annulus 130. During 25 telemetry operations the annulus 130 is filled with a low-viscosity liquid such as water. A surface pipe 131 extends the annulus to a pump system 140 located at the surface. The pump unit includes a main pump for the purpose of filling the annulus and a second pump that is used as an acoustic wave source. The wave source pump includes a piston 141 within 30 the pipe 131 and a drive unit 142. Further elements located at the surface are sensors 150 that monitor acoustic or pressure waveforms within the pipe 131 and thus acoustic

waves traveling within the liquid-filled column formed by the annulus 130 and surface pipe 131.

At a down-hole location there is shown a liquid filled 5 volume formed by a section 132 of the annulus 130 separated from the remaining annulus by a lower packer 133 and an upper packer 134. The packers 133, 134 effectively terminate the liquid filled column formed by the annulus 130 and surface pipe 131 as acoustic waves generated by the source 10 140 are reflected by the upper packer 134.

The modulator of the present example is implemented as a stop valve 161 that opens or blocks the access to the volume 132 via a tube 162 that penetrates the upper packer 134. The 15 valve 161 is operated by a telemetry unit 163 that switches the valve from an open to a closed state and vice versa.

The telemetry unit 163 in turn is connected to a data acquisition unit or measurement sub 170. The unit 170 20 receives measurements from various sensors (not shown) and encodes those measurements into digital data for transmission. Via the telemetry unit 163 these data are transformed into control signals for the valve 161.

25 In operation, the motion of the piston 141 at a selected frequency generates a pressure wave that propagates through the annulus 130 in the down-hole direction. After reaching the closed end of the annulus, this wave is reflected back with a phase shift added by the down-hole data modulator and 30 propagates towards the surface receivers 150.

The data modulator can be seen as consisting of three parts:

firstly a zero-phase-shift reflector, which is the solid body of the upper packer 134 sealing the annulus and designed to have a large acoustic impedance compared with that of the liquid filling the annulus, secondly a 180-
5 degree phase shifting (or phase-inverting) reflector, which is formed when valve 161 is opened and pressure waves are allowed to pass through the tube 162 between the isolated volume 132 and the annulus 130 and thirdly the phase switching control device 162, 163 that enables one of the
10 reflectors (and disables the other) according to the binary digit of the encoded data.

In the example the phase-shifting reflector is implemented as a Helmholtz resonator, with a fluid-filled volume 132
15 providing the acoustic compliance, C, and the inlet tube 162 connecting the annulus and the fluid-filled volume providing an inertance, M, where

$$[1] \quad C = V/\rho c^2$$

20

and

$$[2] \quad M = \rho L/a$$

25 where V is the fluid filled volume 132, ρ and c are the density and sound velocity of the filling fluid, respectively, and L and a are the effective length and the cross-sectional area of the inlet tube 162, respectively. The resonance frequency of the Helmholtz resonator is then
30 given by:

$$[3] \quad \omega_0 = 1/(MC)^{0.5} = c(a/(LV))^{0.5}$$

When the source frequency equals ω_0 , the resonator presents its lowest impedance at the down-hole end of the annulus.

5 When the resonator is enabled, i.e., when the valve 161 is opened, its low impedance is in parallel with the high impedance provided by the upper packer 134 and the reflected pressure wave is phase shifted by approximately 180 degrees, and thus effectively inverted compared to the incoming wave.

10

The value of ω_0 can range from a few Hertz to about 70 Hertz, although for normal applications it is likely to be chosen between 10 to 40Hz.

15 The basic function of the phase switching control device, shown as units 163 and 161 in FIG. 1, is to enable and disable the Helmholtz resonator. When enabled, the acoustic impedance at the down-hole end of the annulus equals that of the resonator, and the reflected wave is phase-inverted.

20 When disabled, the impedance becomes that of the packer, and the reflected wave has no phase change. If one assumes that the inverted phase represents binary digit "1", and no phase shift as digit "0", or vice versa, by controlling the switching device with the binary encoded data, the reflected

25 wave becomes a BPSK (binary phase shift key) modulated wave, carrying data to the surface.

30 The switching frequency, which determines the data rate (in bits/s), does not have to be the same as the source frequency. For instance for a 24Hz source (and a 24Hz resonator), the switching frequency can be 12Hz or 6Hz, giving a data rate of 12-bit/s or 6-bit/s.

The down-hole data are gathered by the measurement sub 170. The measurement sub 170 contains various sensors or gauges (pressure, temperature etc.) and is mounted below the lower 5 packer 133 to monitor conditions at a location of interest. The measurement sub may further contain data-encoding units and/or a memory unit that records data for delayed transmission to the surface.

10 The measured and digitized data are transmitted over a suitable communication link 171 to the telemetry unit 163, which is situated above the packer. This short link can be an electrical or optical cable that traverses the dual packer, either inside the packer or inside the wall of the 15 work string 120. Alternatively it can be implemented as a short distance acoustic link or as a radio frequency electromagnetic wave link with the transmitter and the receiver separated by the packers 133, 134.

20 The telemetry unit 163 is used to encode the data for transmission, if such encoding has not been performed by the measurement sub 170. It further provides power amplification to the coded signal, through an electrical power amplifier, and electrical to mechanical energy conversion, through an 25 appropriate actuator.

For use as a two-way telemetry system, the telemetry unit also accepts a surface pressure wave signal through a down-hole acoustic receiver 164.

30 A two-way telemetry system can be applied to alter the operational modes of down-hole devices, such as sampling

rate, telemetry data rate during the operation. Other functions unrelated to altering measurement and telemetry modes may include open or close certain down-hole valve or energize a down-hole actuator. The principle of down-hole to 5 surface telemetry (up-link) has already been described in the previous sections. To perform the surface to down-hole down link, the surface source sends out a signal frequency, which is significantly different from the resonance frequency of the Helmholtz resonator and hence outside the 10 up-link signal spectrum and not significantly affected by the down-hole modulator.

For instance, for a 20Hz resonator, the down-linking frequency may be 39Hz (in choosing the frequency, the 15 distribution of pump noise frequencies, mainly in the lower frequency region, need to be considered). When the down-hole receiver 164 detects this frequency, the down-hole telemetry unit 163 enters into a down-link mode and the modulator is disabled by blocking the inlet 162 of the resonator. Surface 20 commands may then be sent down by using appropriate modulation coding, for instance, BPSK or FSK on the down-link carrier frequency.

The up-link and down-link may also be performed 25 simultaneously. In such case a second surface source is used. This may be achieved by driving the same physical device 140 with two harmonic waveforms, one up-link carrier and one down-link wave, if such device has sufficient dynamic performance. In such parallel transmissions, the 30 frequency spectra of up and down going signals should be clearly separated in the frequency domain.

The above described elements of the novel telemetry system may be improved or adapted in various ways to different down hole operations.

5 In the example of FIG 1, the volume 132 of the Helmholtz resonator is formed by inflating the lower main packer 133 and the upper reflecting packer 134, and is filled with the same fluid as that present in the column 130. However as an alternative the Helmholtz resonator may be implemented as a
10 part of dedicated pipe section or sub.

For example in FIG. 2, the phase-shifting device forms part of a sub 210 to be included into a work string 220 or the like. The volume 232 of the Helmholtz resonator is enclosed
15 between a section of the work string 220 and a cylindrical enclosure 230 surrounding it. Tubes 262a,b of different lengths and/or diameter provide openings to the wellbore. Valves 261a,b open or close these openings in response to the control signals of a telemetry unit 263. A packer 234
20 reflects the incoming waves with phase shifts that depend on the state of the valves 261a,b.

The volume 232 and the inlet tubes 262a,b are shown pre-filled with a liquid, which may be water, silicone oil, or
25 any other suitable low-viscosity liquid. Appropriate dimensions for inlet tubes 262 and the volume 232 can be selected in accordance with equations [1] - [3] to suit different resonance frequency requirements. With the choice of different tubes 262a,b, the device can be operated at an
30 equivalent number of different carrier wave frequencies.

In the following example the novel telemetry system is

implemented as a coiled tubing unit deployable from the surface. Coiled tubing is an established technique for well intervention and other operations. In coiled tubing a reeled continuous pipe is lowered into the well. In such a system 5 the acoustic channel is created by filling the coiled tubing with a suitable liquid. Obviously the advantage of such a system is its independence from the specific well design, in particular from the existence or non-existence of a liquid filled annulus for use as an acoustic channel.

10

A first variant of this embodiment is shown in FIG. 3. In FIG. 3A, there is shown a borehole 310 surrounded by casing pipes 311. It is assumed that no production tubing has been installed. Illustrating the application of the novel system 15 in a well stimulation operation, pressurized fluid is pumped through a treat line 312 at the well head 313 directly into the cased bore hole 310. The stimulation or fracturing fluid enters the formation through the perforation 314 where the pressure causes cracks allowing improved access to oil 20 bearing formations. During such a stimulation operation it is desirable to monitor locally, i.e., at the location of the perforations, the changing wellbore conditions such as temperature and pressure in real time, so as to enable an operator to control the operation on the basis of improved 25 data.

The telemetry tool includes a surface section 340 preferably attached to the surface end 321 of the coiled tubing 320. The surface section includes an acoustic source unit 341 30 that generates waves in the liquid filled tubing 320. The acoustic source 341 on surface can be a piston source driven by electro-dynamic means, or even a modified piston pump

with small piston displacement in the range of a few millimeters. Two sensors 350 monitor amplitude and/or phase of the acoustic waves traveling through the tubing. A signal processing and decoder unit 351 is used to decode the signal 5 after removing effects of noise and distortion, and to recover the down-hole data. A transition section 342, which has a gradually changing diameter, provides acoustic impedance match between the coiled tubing 320 and the instrumented surface pipe section 340.

10

At the distant end 323 of the coiled tubing there is attached a monitoring and telemetry sub 360, as shown in detail in FIG. 3B. The sub 360 includes a flow-through tube 364, a lower control valve 365, down-hole gauge and

15 electronics assembly 370, which contains pressure and temperature gauges, data memory, batteries and an additional electronics unit 363 for data acquisition, telemetry and control, a liquid volume or compliance 332, a throat tube 362 and an upper control/modulation valve 361 to perform the

20 phase shifting modulation. The electronic unit 363 contains an electromechanical driver, which drives the control/modulation valve 361. In case of a solenoid valve, the driver is an electrical one that drives the valve via a cable connection. Another cable 371 provides a link between 25

the solenoid valve 365 and the unit 363.

The coiled tubing 320, carrying the down-hole monitoring/telemetry sub 360, is deployed through the well head 313 by using a tubing reel 324, a tubing feeder 325, 30 which is mounted on a support frame 326. Before starting data acquisition and telemetry, both valves 361, 365 are opened, and a low attenuation liquid, e.g. water, is pumped

through the coiled tubing 320 by the main pump 345, until the entire coiled tubing and the liquid compliance 332 are filled with water. The lower valve 365 is then shut maintaining a water filled continuous acoustic channel.

5 Ideally the down-hole sub is positioned well below the perforation to avoid high speed and abrasive fluid flow. The liquid compliance (volume) 332 and the throat tube 362 together form a Helmholtz resonator, whose resonance frequency is designed to match the telemetry frequency from
10 the acoustic source 341 on the surface.

The modulation valve 361, when closed, provides a high impedance termination to the acoustic channel, and acoustic wave from the surface is reflected at the valve with little
15 change in its phase. When the valve is open, the Helmholtz resonator provides a low termination to the channel, and the reflected wave has an added phase shift of close to 180°. Therefore the valve controlled by a binary data code will produce an up-going (reflected) wave with a BPSK modulation.

20 After the stimulation job, the in-well coiled tubing system can be used to clean up the well. This can be done by opening both valves 361, 362 and by pumping an appropriate cleaning fluid through the coiled tubing 320.

25 Coiled tubing system, as described in FIG. 3, may also be used to establish a telemetry channel through production tubing or other down-hole installations.

30 In the above examples of the telemetry system the reflected signals monitored on the surface are generally small compared to the carrier wave signal. The reflected and

phase-modulated signal, due to the attenuation by the channel, is much weaker than this background interference. Ignoring the losses introduced by the non-ideal characteristics of the down-hole modulator, the amplitude of 5 the signal is given by:

$$[4] A_r = A_s 10^{-2\alpha L/20}$$

where A_r and A_s are the amplitudes of the reflected wave 10 and the source wave, both at the receiver, α is the wave attenuation coefficient in dB/Kft and $2L$ is the round trip distance from surface to down-hole, and then back to the surface. Assuming a water filled annulus with $\alpha = 1\text{dB/kft}$ at 15 25Hz, then for a well of 10kft depth, then $A_r = 0.1A_s$, or the received wave amplitude is attenuated by 20dB compared with the source wave.

The plot shown in FIG. 4A shows a simulated receiver 20 spectrum for an application with 10kft water filled annulus. A carrier and resonator frequency of 20Hz is assumed. The phase modulation is done by randomly switching (at a frequency of 10Hz) between the reflection coefficient of a down-hole packer (0.9) and that of the Helmholtz resonator (-0.8). The effect is close to a BPSK modulation. The 25 background source wave (narrow band peak at 20Hz) interferes with the BPSK signal spectrum which is shown in FIG. 4B.

Signal processing can be used to receive the wanted signal 30 in the presence of such a strong sinusoidal tone from the source. A BPSK signal $v(t)$ can be described mathematically as follows

[5] $v(t) = d(t)A_v \cos(\omega_c t)$

where

5 $d(t) \in \{+1, -1\}$ = binary modulation waveform

A_v = signal amplitude and

ω_c = radian frequency of carrier wave.

The source signal at the surface has the form

10

[6] $s(t) = A_s \cos(\omega_c t)$

The received signal $r(t)$ at surface is the sum of the source signal and the modulated signal.

15

$$[7] \quad r(t) = d(t)A_v \cos(\omega_c t) + A_s \cos(\omega_c t) \\ = A_s \left[1 + \frac{A_v}{A_s} d(t) \right] \cos(\omega_c t)$$

Equation [7] has the form of an amplitude modulated signal with binary digital data as the modulating waveform. Thus a 20 receiver for amplitude modulation can be used to recover the transmitted data waveform $d(t)$.

Alternatively, since the modulated signal and carrier source waves are traveling in opposite directions, a directional 25 filter, e.g. the differential filter used in mud pulse telemetry reception as shown for example in the US Pat. Nos. 3,742,443 and 3,747,059, could be used to suppress the source tone from the received signal. The data could then be recovered using a BPSK receiver.

It is likely that the modulated received signal will be distorted when it reaches the surface sensors, because of wave reflections at acoustic impedance changes along the 5 annulus channel as well as at the bottom of the hole and the surface. A form of adaptive channel equalization will be required to counteract the effects of the signal distortion.

10 The down-hole modulator works by changing the reflection coefficient at the bottom of the annulus so as to generate phase changes of 180 degrees, i.e. having a reflection coefficient that varies between +1 and -1. In practice the reflection coefficient γ of the down-hole modulator will not produce exactly 180 degree phase changes and thus will be of 15 the form

$$[8] \quad \gamma = G_0 e^{j\theta_0}, \quad d(t) = 0 \\ = G_1 e^{j\theta_1}, \quad d(t) = 1$$

where

20 G_0 and G_1 are the magnitudes of the reflection coefficients for a "0" and "1" respectively. Similarly, θ_0 and θ_1 are the phase of the reflection coefficients.

25 A more optimum receiver for this type of signal could be developed that estimates the actual phase and amplitude changes from the received waveform and then uses a decision boundary that is the locus of the two points in the received signal constellation to recover the binary data.

30 Design tolerances and changes in down-hole conditions such as temperature, pressure may cause mismatch in source and

resonator frequencies in practical operations, affecting the quality of modulation. To overcome this, a tuning procedure can be run after the deployment of the tool down-hole and prior to the operation and data transmission. FIGS. 5A,B

5 illustrate the steps of an example of such a tuning procedure, with FIG. 5A detailing the steps performed in the surface units and FIG. 5B those preformed by the down-hole units.

10 The down-hole modulator is set to a special mode that modulates the reflected wave with a known sequence of digits, e.g. a square wave like sequence. The surface source then generates a number of frequencies in incremental steps, each last a short while, say 10 seconds, covering the
15 possible range of the resonator frequency. The surface signal processing unit analyzes the received phase modulated signal. The frequency at which the maximum difference between digit "1" and digit "0" is achieved is selected as the correct telemetry frequency.

20 Further fine-tuning may be done by transmitting frequencies in smaller steps around the frequency selected in the first pass, and repeating the process. During such a process, the down-hole pressure can also be recorded through an acoustic
25 down-hole receiver. The frequency that gives maximum difference in down-hole wave phase (and minimum difference in amplitude) between digit state "1" and "0" is the right frequency. This frequency can be sent to the surface in a "confirmation" mode following the initial tunings steps, in
30 which the frequency value, or an index number assigned to such frequency value, is encoded on to the reflected waves and sent to the surface.

The test and tuning procedure may also help to identify characteristics of the telemetry channel and to develop channel equalization algorithm that could be used to filter 5 in the received signals.

The tuning process can be done more efficiently if a down-link is implemented. Thus once it identifies the right frequency, the surface system can inform the down-hole unit 10 to change mode, rather than to continue the stepping through all remaining test frequencies.

A consideration affecting the applicability of the novel telemetry system relates to the power consumption level of 15 the down-hole phase switching device, and the capacity of the battery or energy source that is required to power it.

In a case where the power consumption of an on-off solenoid valve prevents its use in the down-hole phase switching 20 device, an alternative device can be implemented using a piezoelectric stack that converts electrical energy into mechanical displacement.

In FIG. 6, there is shown a schematic diagram of elements 25 used in a piezoelectrically operated valve. The valve includes stack 61 of piezoelectric discs and wires 62 to apply a driving voltage across the piezoelectric stack. The stack operates an amplification system 63 that converts the elongation of the piezoelectric element into macroscopic 30 motion. The amplification system can be based on mechanical amplification as shown or using a hydraulic amplification as used for example to control fuel injectors for internal

combustion engines. The amplification system 63 operates the valve cover 64 so as to shut or open an inlet tube 65. The drive voltage can be controlled by a telemetry unit, such as 163 in FIG. 1.

5

Though the power consumption of the piezoelectric stack is thought to be lower than for a solenoid system, it remains a function of the data rate and the diameter of the inlet tube, which typically ranges from a few millimeters to a few 10 centimeters.

Additionally, electrical coils or magnets (not shown) may be installed around the inlet tube 65. When energized, they produce an electromagnetic or magnetic force that pulls the 15 valve cover 64 towards the inlet tube 65, and thus ensuring a tight closure of the inlet.

The use of a strong acoustic source on the surface enables an alternative to down-hole batteries as power supply. The 20 surface system can be used to transmit power from surface in the form of acoustic energy and then convert it into electric energy through a down-hole electro-acoustic transducer. In FIGs. 7A,B there is shown a power generator that is designed to extract electric energy from the 25 acoustic source.

A surface power source 740, which operates at a frequency that is significantly different from the telemetry frequency, sends an acoustic wave down the annulus 730. 30 Preferably this power frequency is close to the higher limit of the first pass-band, e.g. 40~ 60 Hz, or in the 2nd or 3rd pass-band of the annulus channel, say 120Hz but preferably

below 200Hz to avoid excessive attenuation. The source can be an electro-dynamic or piezoelectric bender type actuator, which generates a displacement of at least a few millimeters at the said frequency. It could be a high stroke rate and 5 low volume piston pump, which is adapted as an acoustic wave source.

In the example of FIG. 7, the electrical to mechanic energy converter 742 drives the linear and harmonic motion of a 10 piston 741, which compresses/de-compresses the liquid in the annulus. The source generates in the annulus 730 an acoustic power level in the region of a kilowatt corresponding to a pressure amplitude of about 100psi (0.6 MPa). Assuming an attenuation of 10dB in the acoustic channel, the down-hole 15 pressure at 10Kft is about 30psi (0.2MPa) and the acoustic power delivered to this depth is estimated to be approximately 100W. Using a transducer with mechanical to electrical conversion efficiency of 0.5, 50W of electrical power could be extracted continuously at the down-hole 20 location.

As shown in FIG. 7A, the down-hole generator includes a piezoelectric stack 71, similar to the one illustrated in FIG. 6. The stack is attached at its base to a tubing string 25 720 or any other stationary or quasi-stationary element in the well through a fixing block 72. A pressure change causes a contraction or extension of the stack 71. This creates an alternating voltage across the piezoelectric stack, whose impedance is mainly capacitive. The capacitance is 30 discharged through a rectifier circuit 73 and then is used to charge a large energy storing capacitor 74 as shown in FIG. 7B. The energy stored in the capacitor 74 provides

electrical power to down-hole devices such as the gauge sub
75.

The efficiency of the energy conversion process depends on
5 the acoustic impedance match (mechanical stiffness match) between the fluid wave guide 720 and the piezoelectric stack 71. The stiffness of the fluid channel depends on frequency, cross-sectional area and the acoustic impedance of the fluid. The stiffness of the piezoelectric stack 71 depends
10 on a number of factors, including its cross-section (area) to length ratio, electrical load impedance, voltage amplitude across the stack, etc. An impedance match may be facilitated by attaching an additional mass 711 to the piezoelectric stack 71, so that a match is achieved near the
15 resonance frequency of the spring-mass system.

FIG. 8 summarizes the steps described above.

While the invention has been described in conjunction with
20 the exemplary embodiments described above, many equivalent modifications and variations will be apparent to those skilled in the art when given this disclosure. Accordingly, the exemplary embodiments of the invention set forth above are considered to be illustrative and not limiting. Various
25 changes to the described embodiments may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.

CLAIMS

1. An acoustic telemetry apparatus for communicating digital data from a down-hole location through a borehole to
5 the surface comprising:

an acoustic channel terminated at a down-hole end by a reflecting terminal;

10 an acoustic wave generator located at the surface and providing an acoustic wave carrier signal within said acoustic channel;

a modulator located at said down-hole location and adapted to modulate amplitude and/or phase of said carrier wave in response to a digital signal; and

15 one or more sensors located at the surface adapted to detect amplitude and/or phase related information of acoustic waves traveling within said acoustic channel.

2. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the modulator modulates the reflection properties of reflecting terminal.

20

3. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the modulator and the reflecting terminal form a variable phase shifting reflector for the carrier wave.

25

4. The apparatus of claim 2 wherein the modulator modulates the reflection properties of the reflecting terminal in discrete steps.

30

5. The apparatus of claim 4 wherein the modulator switches between a first state that causes the phase of an acoustic wave reflected at said terminal to invert and a second state that maintains the original phase of the

incident wave.

6. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the acoustic channel is a column of liquid extending from the surface to 5 a down-hole location.

7. The apparatus of claim 6 wherein the acoustic channel is formed by filling an annular volume in the borehole with a liquid.

10

8. The apparatus of claim 6 wherein the acoustic channel is formed by filling a tubing string suspended in the borehole with a liquid.

15

9. The apparatus of claim 6 wherein the column of liquid has a viscosity of less than 3×10^{-3} NS/m².

20

10. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the modulator is a resonator located in the vicinity of the reflecting terminal point.

11. The apparatus of claim 10 wherein the resonator comprises a liquid filled volume enclosed in a housing having a tubular opening to the reflecting terminal.

25

12. The apparatus of claim 11 wherein the resonator has two or more tubular openings to the reflecting terminal.

30

13. The apparatus of claim 11 wherein the acoustic wave generator is adapted to simultaneously generate acoustic waves at different frequencies.

14. The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising an acoustic receiver in a down-hole location adapted to receive acoustic channel in a down-hole location.

5 15. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the digital data is encoded digital data.

10 16. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the sensors are connected to a decoding unit adapted to convert detected amplitude and/or phase related information into a digital signal.

15 17. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the sensors are connected to a signal processing unit adapted to filter the carrier wave signal from detected information.

18. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the modulator comprises a piezoelectric actuator.

20 19. The apparatus of claim 1 comprising a down-hole power generator adapted to convert acoustic energy from an acoustic wave signal generated at the surface.

25 20. Use of the apparatus of claim 1 in a well stimulation operation.

21. A method of communicating digital data from a down-hole location through a borehole to the surface comprising the steps of:

30 establishing an acoustic channel through said borehole and terminating said acoustic channel at a down-hole end by a reflecting terminal;

generating from the surface an acoustic wave carrier signal within said acoustic channel;

modulating amplitude and/or phase of said carrier wave in response to a digital signal; and

5 detecting at the surface amplitude and/or phase related information of acoustic waves traveling within said acoustic channel.

22. The method of claim 21 wherein the step of
10 modulating amplitude and/or phase of the carrier wave comprises the step of changing the reflecting properties of the reflecting terminal.

23. The method of claim 22 wherein the reflecting
15 properties of the reflecting terminal are changed in discrete steps.

24. The method of claim 21 further comprising the step of placing a Helmholtz resonator in proximity to the
20 reflecting terminal.

25. The method of claim 21 further comprising the steps of
steps of
performing measurements of down-hole parameters,
encoding said measurements into a bitstream; and
controlling the reflecting properties of the
reflecting terminal in response to said encoded bitstream.

26. The method of claim 21 further comprising the
30 step of
selecting the frequency of the carrier wave such that it is close to the resonance frequency of a resonator

used to modulate said carrier wave.

27. The method of claim 21 further comprising the steps of

5 scanning through a range of possible carrier frequencies;

monitoring at the surface reflected and modulated wave signal;

10 selecting the frequency of the carrier wave such that the detection of said reflected and modulated wave signal is optimized; and

commencing the communication of down-hole measurements.

15 28. A method of stimulating a wellbore comprising the steps of

performing operations designed to improve the production of said wellbore while simultaneously establishing an acoustic channel through said borehole and 20 terminating said acoustic channel at a down-hole end by a reflecting terminal;

generating from the surface an acoustic wave carrier signal through within said acoustic channel;

25 modulating amplitude and/or phase of said carrier wave in response to a digital signal; and

detecting at the surface amplitude and/or phase related information of acoustic waves traveling within said acoustic channel.

ABSTRACT

An acoustic telemetry apparatus and method for communicating encoded digital data from a down-hole location through a borehole to the surface is described including an acoustic channel terminated at a down-hole end by a reflecting terminal, an acoustic wave generator located at the surface and providing an acoustic wave carrier signal through said acoustic channel, a modulator located down-hole to modulate amplitude and/or phase of said carrier wave in response to an encoded digital signal and one or more sensors located at the surface adapted to detect amplitude and/or phase related information of acoustic waves traveling within said acoustic channel to determine the encoded digital data.

15

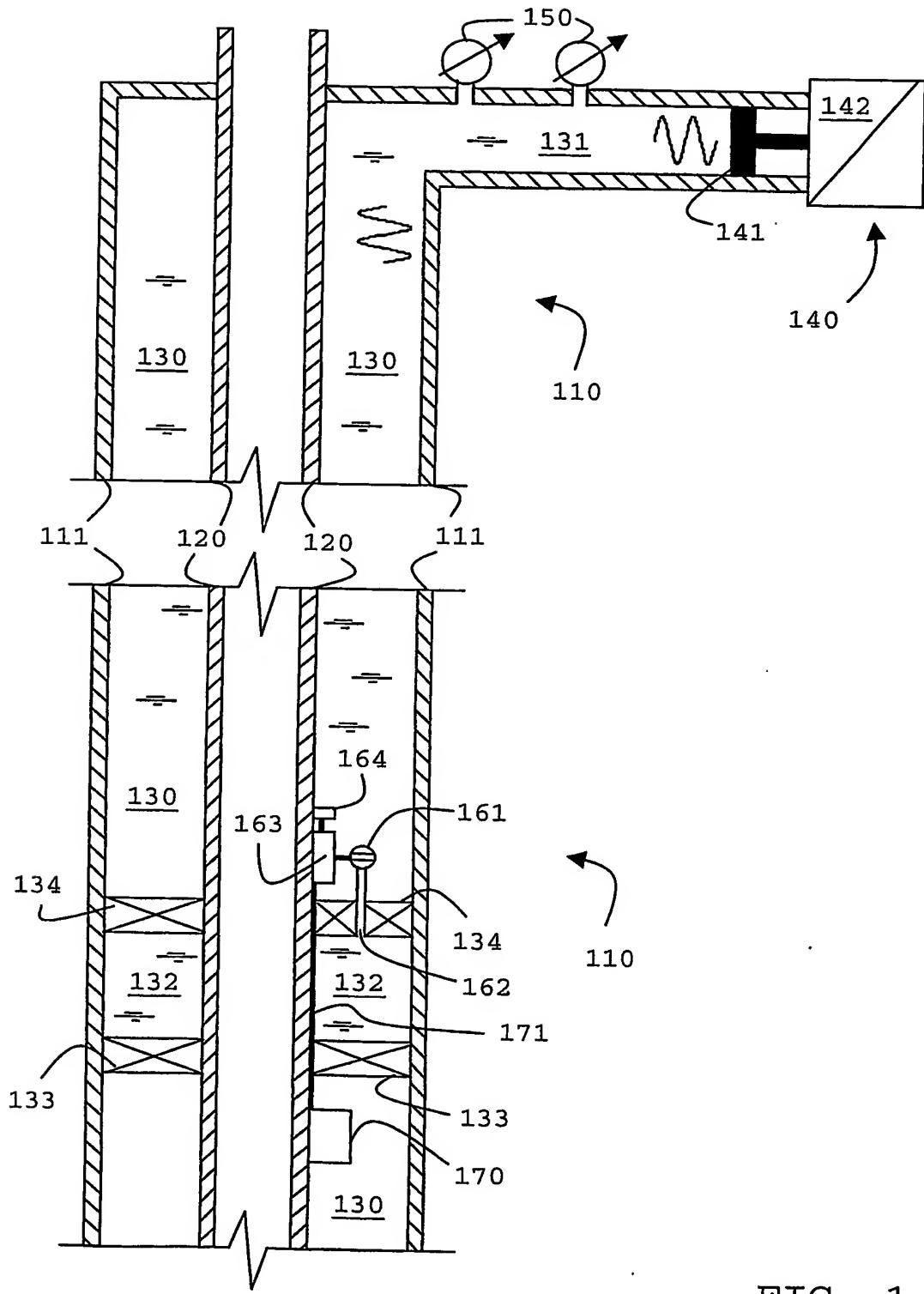


FIG. 1

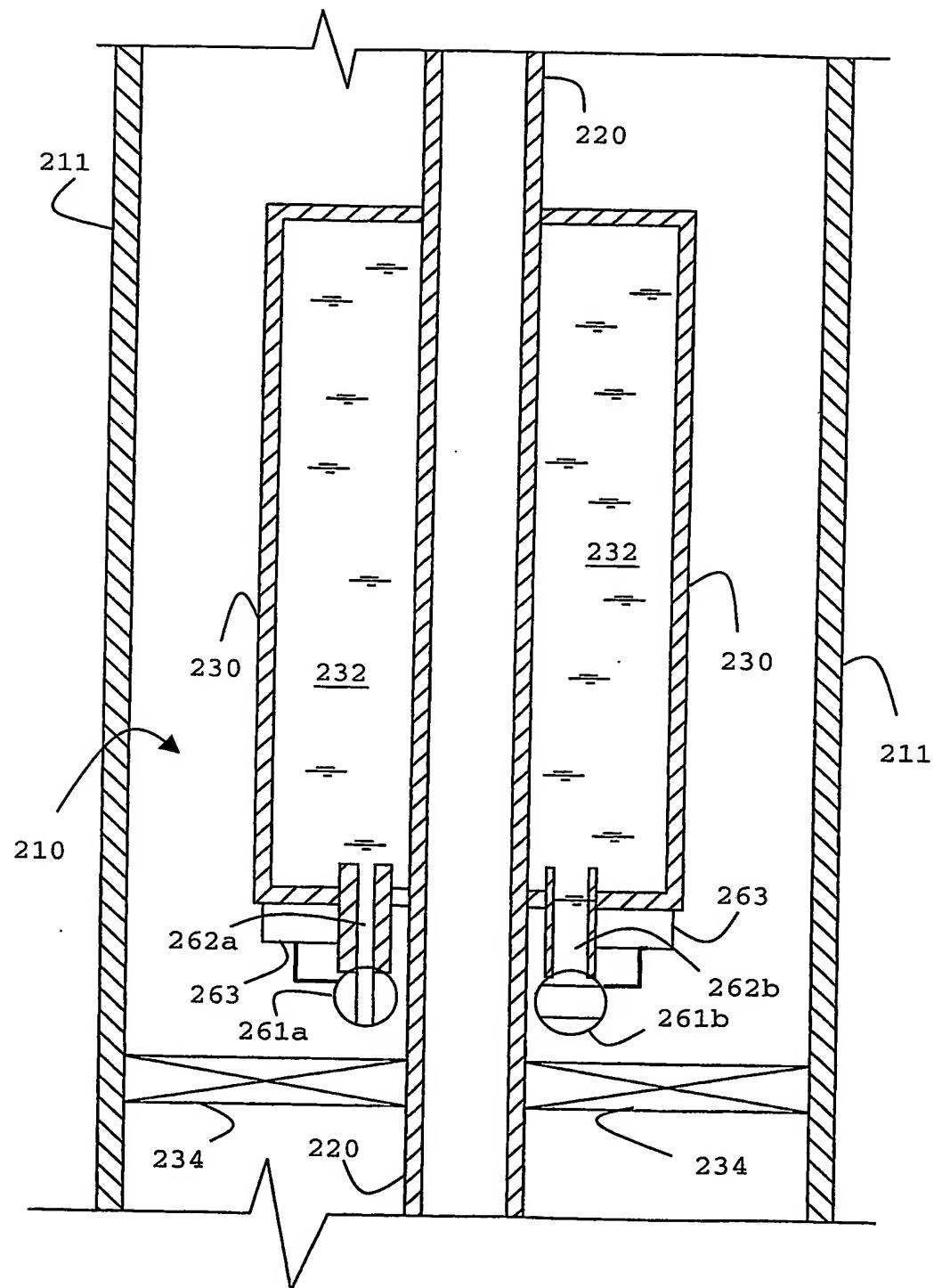


FIG. 2

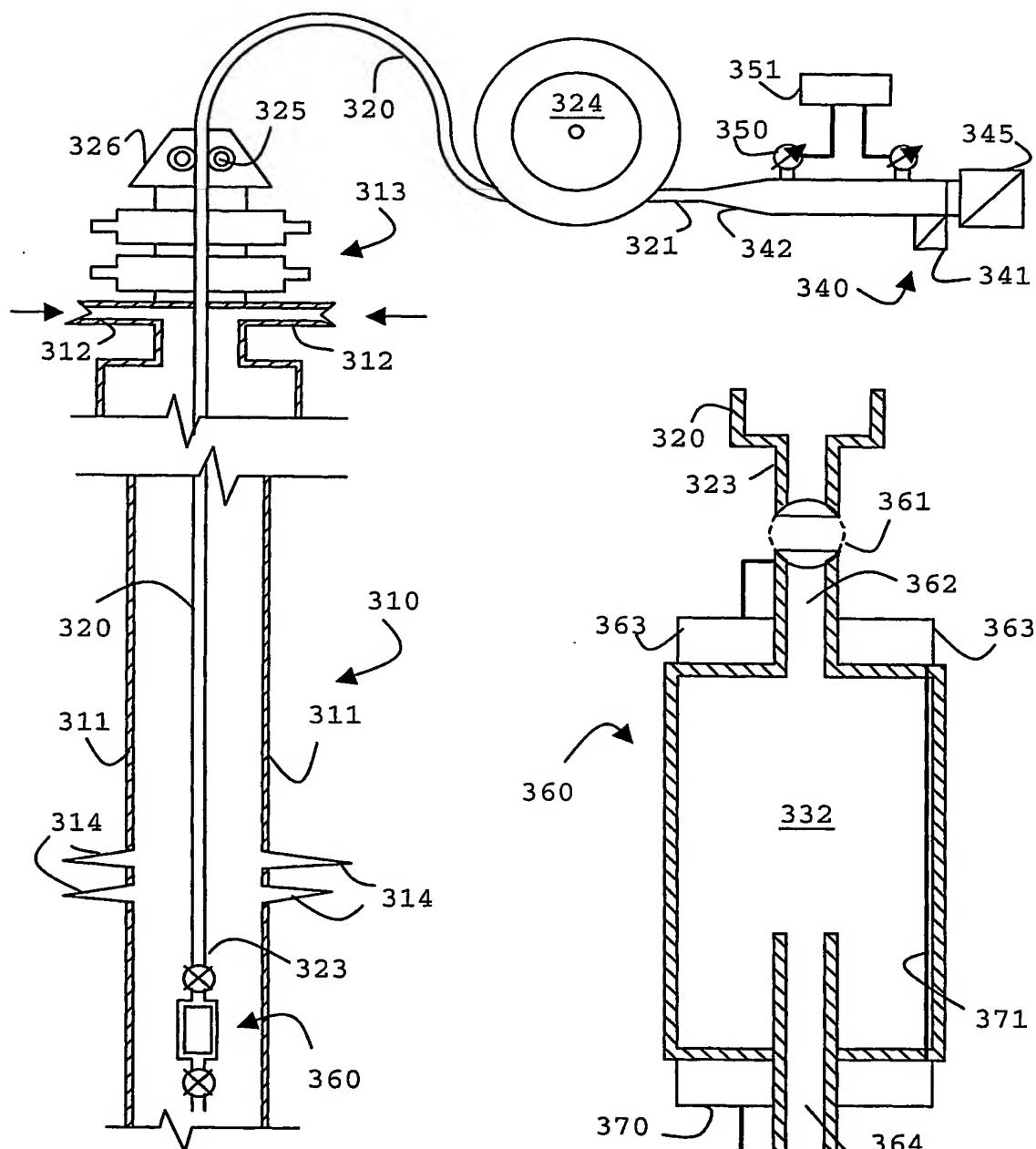


FIG. 3A

FIG. 3B

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FIG. 4A

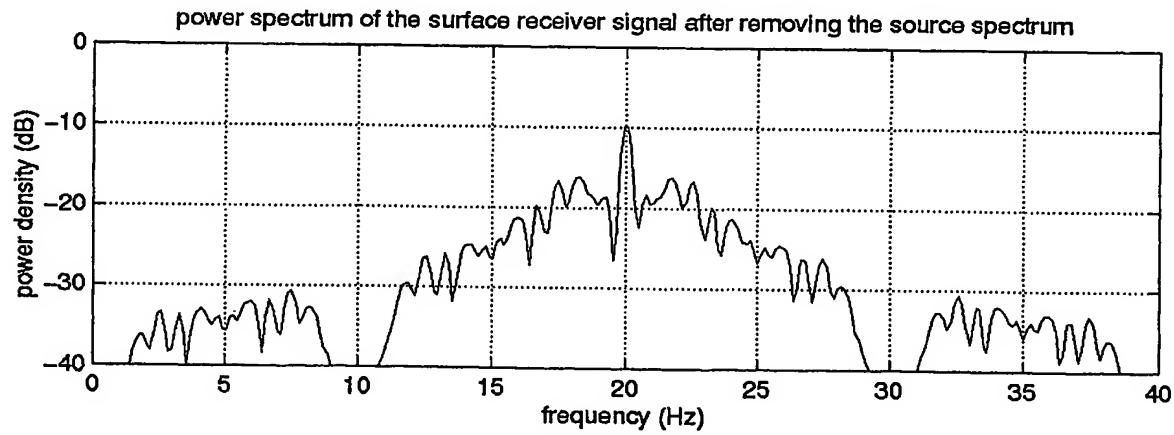
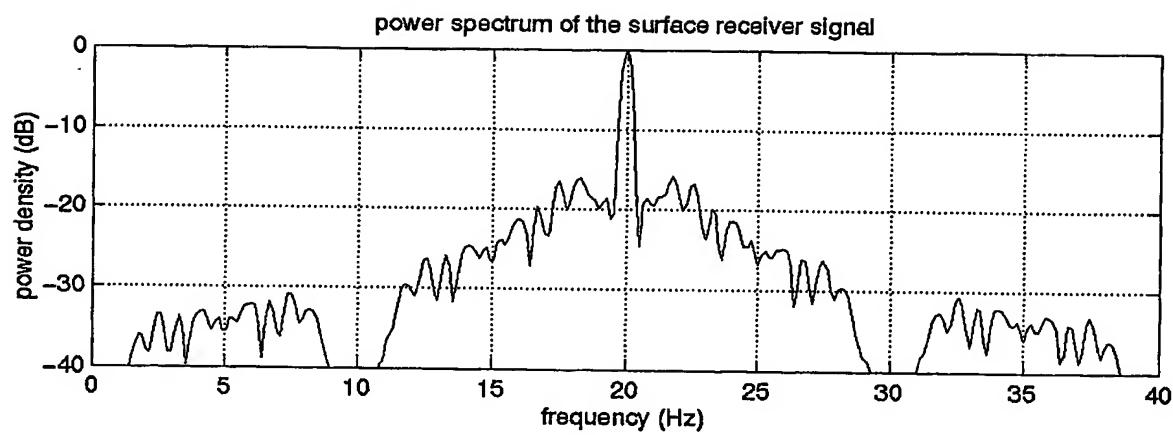


FIG. 4B

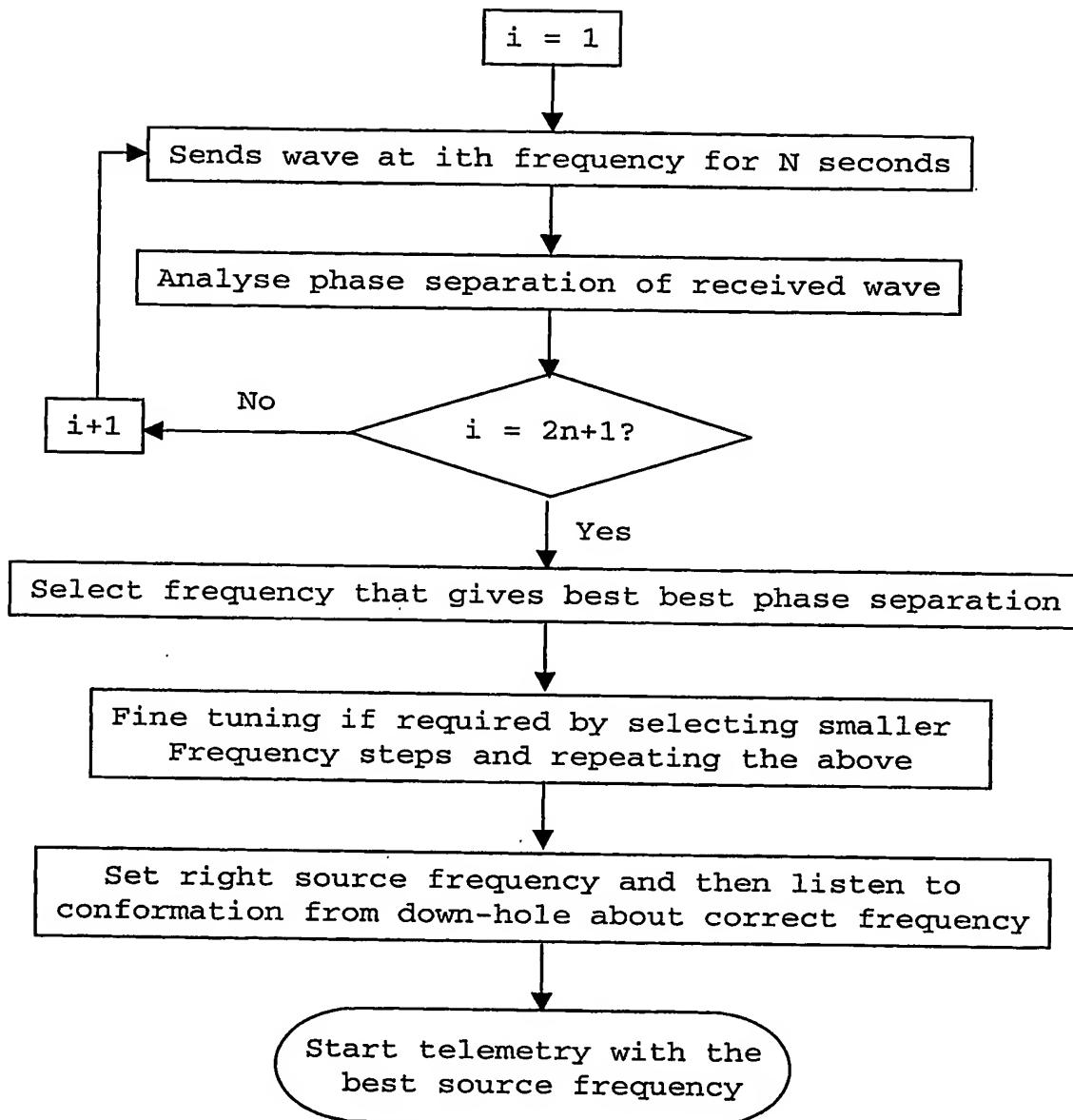


FIG. 5A

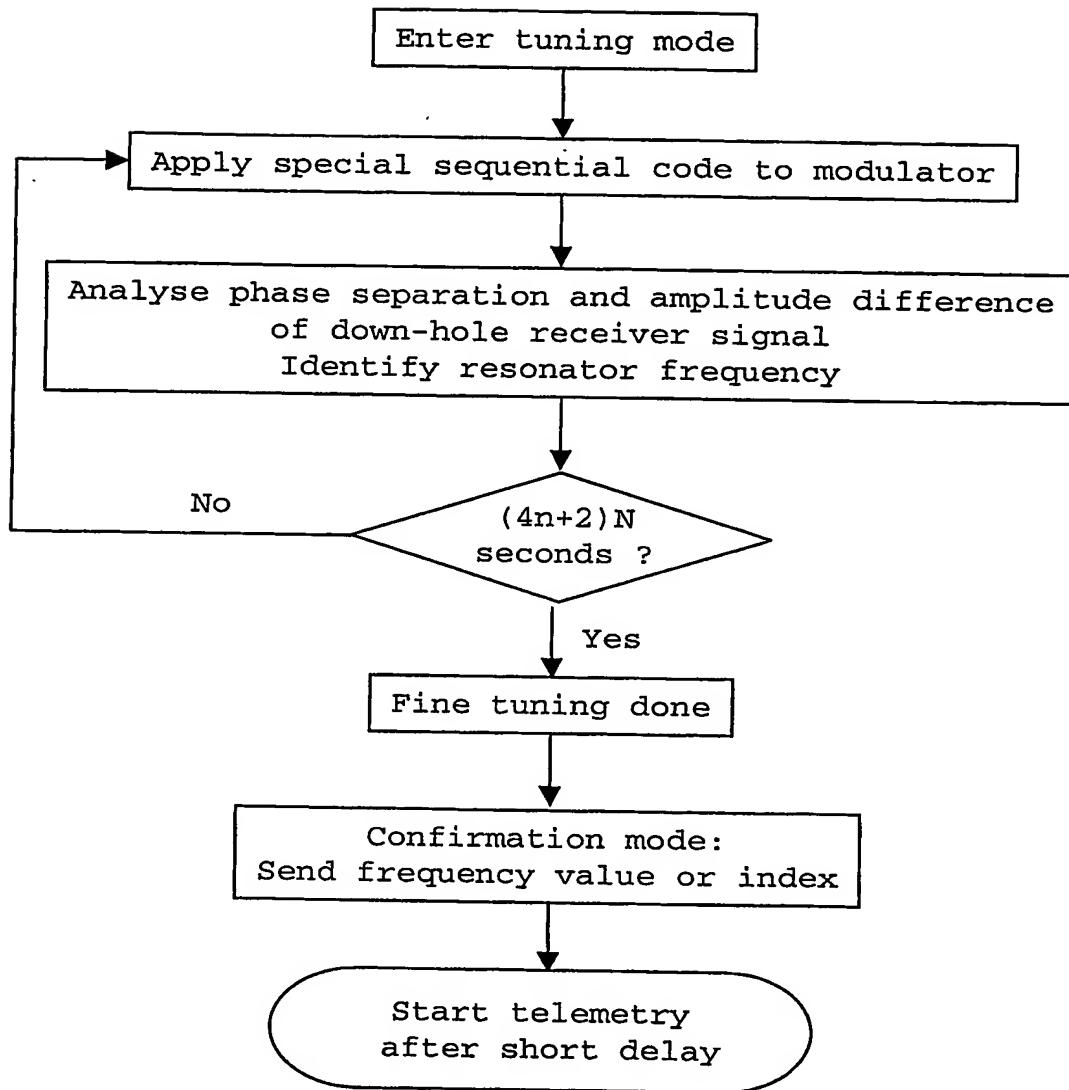


FIG. 5B

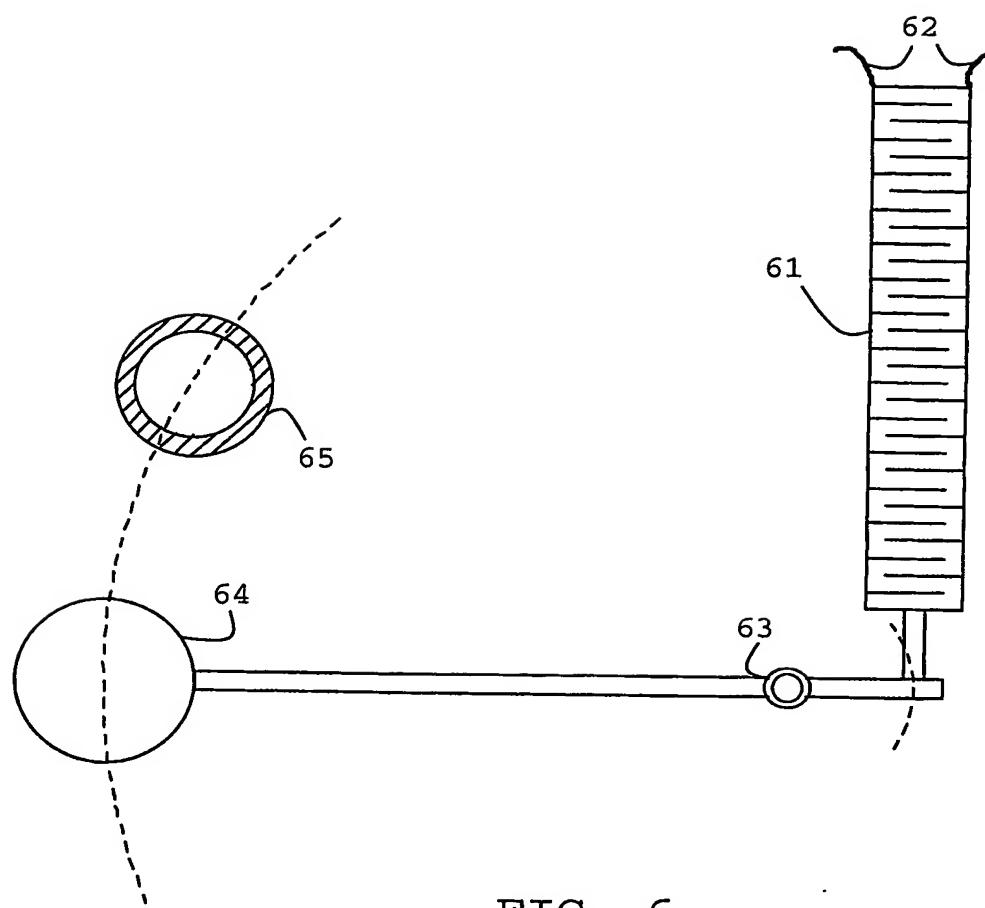


FIG. 6

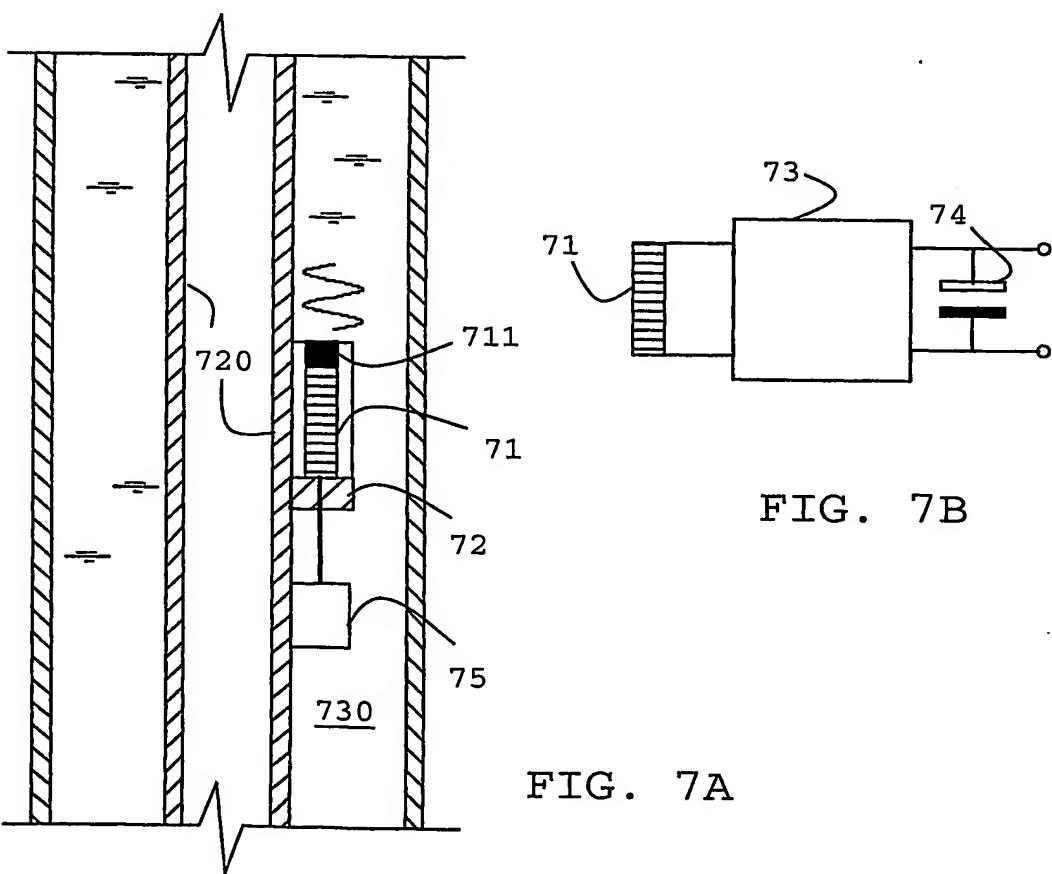
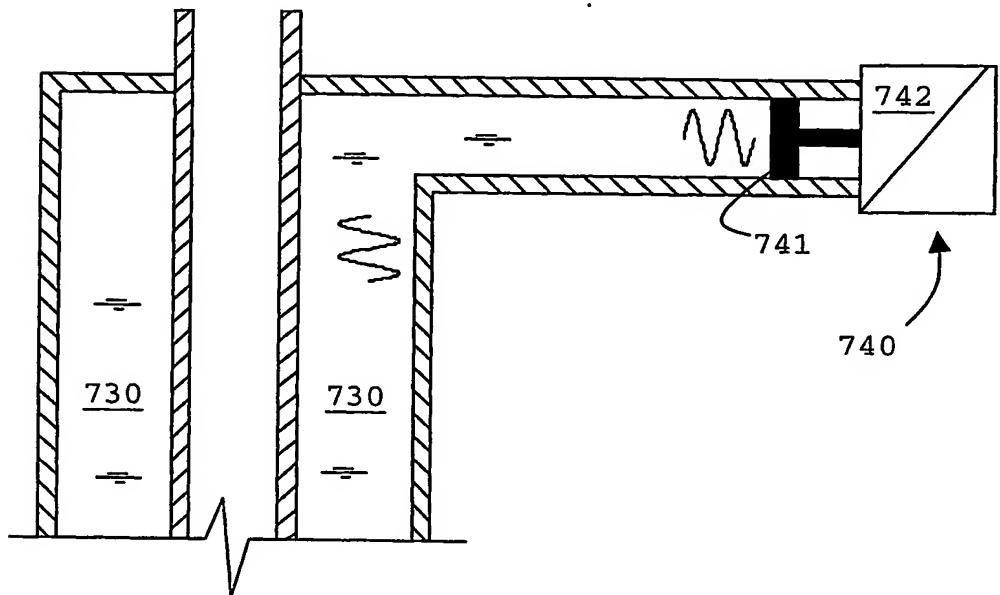


FIG. 7B

FIG. 7A

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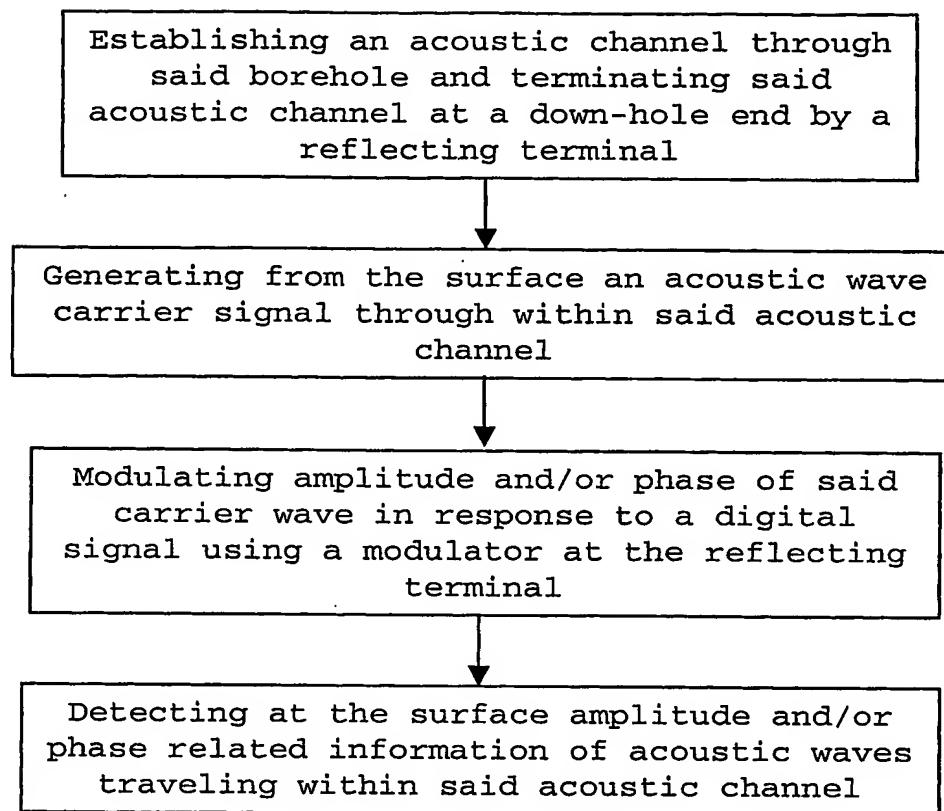
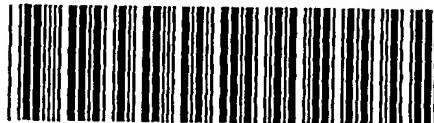


FIG. 8

PCT/GB2004/001281



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